

BREAKING

GROUND

NUMBER 80 | NOVEMBER 2015



**IN THIS
ISSUE:**

**THE KIDD'S JOURNEY
TO ABIGAIL'S PLAN**

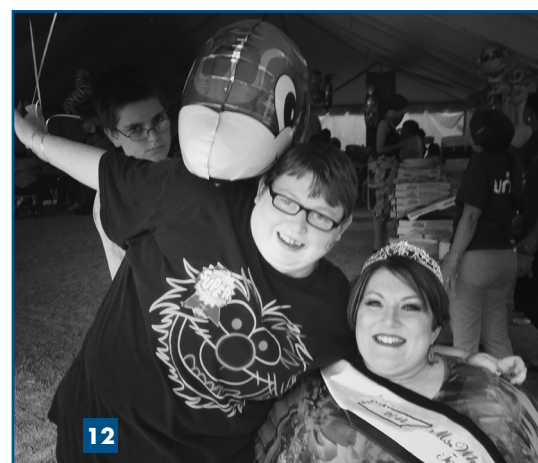


TENNESSEE COUNCIL
on developmental disabilities



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 3 The Kidd's Journey to Abigail's Plan**
- 6 Regina & Fiona: Friendship Develops through Best Buddies Citizens Program**
- 8 Building Skills, Connections and Employment Experience through Volunteering**
- 10 Timothy Shriver Opens Up About Strengths, Health and Faith**
- 12 Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee: More Than a Crown**
- 14 Meet the New Council Members**
- 16 Partners 2015-16 Leadership Institute Class Selected**
- 17 TN Spotlight**
- 19 Deborah Cunningham: In Memoriam**
- 19 Tennessee Disability Pathfinder Gets a New Facelift**



Learn more about the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.
615.532.6615 | www.tn.gov/cdd | www.facebook.com/TNCouncilonDD | Tnddc@tn.gov
Subscriptions to *Breaking Ground* are free and available through the Council office.

Contact us by phone or email with subscription updates or requests, and please include name and mailing or email address.



Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities,
Authorization No. 344067, November 2014, 32,400 copies.
This public document was promulgated at a cost of \$.45 per copy.

Cover photo by Mac Brown Photography



THE KIDD'S JOURNEY to Abigail's Plan

by Tommy Lee Kidd

Lesla and I married in 1998 and we had plans to have two or three healthy children, like most other newly married couples. While it was not my plan or my wife's plan to have a child with Down syndrome, we now know it was God's Plan.

We were made aware 16 weeks into Lesla's pregnancy that Abigail had Down syndrome and serious intestinal and heart defects. During all of the surgeries and hospital stays, Abigail was always pleasant and continues to be a blessing to everyone she meets. A lady that visited us during one of our lengthy hospital stays said, "I think that God placed people with Down syndrome on the earth to show us what he wanted us all to be like."

The more Abigail grows up, the more I know that lady was right.

Abigail has no ability to judge anyone, she sees everyone as exactly the same. Abigail does not have any greed; money is of no value to Abigail. Every minute of every day is a new adventure for her, and for us. Instead of me teaching my daughter lessons about life, it has been the other way around. I have learned so many life lessons

from Abigail as she has grown into a wonderful young lady.

Because of Abigail, Lesla and I have been blessed to be appointed to several disability boards and advisory committees at the local and state level. I have been afforded the wonderful



opportunity to currently be serving as the Vice-Chairman on the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, the very organization that brings you this fantastic magazine, Breaking Ground. Lesla, Abigail, and I have traveled to Washington, DC as a part of the Tennessee Delegation to speak with our US Senators and Congressmen regarding disability policy issues.

Abigail is in the 8th grade at New Prospect School in Lawrence County. Throughout Abigail's life, Lesla and I have never placed any limits on anything Abigail wanted to do. She recently retired her basketball uniform in the Fall of 2013, asking if she could be on the cheerleading squad at New Prospect Elementary School. She is starting her third year as a cheerleader, and everything she does in her everyday life now includes some type of cheerleading move.

Because of Abigail's disability (or "greater ability" as Lesla and I like to say), we believe that every person, regardless of their physical or intellectual challenges, should have an opportunity to participate in organized events. Six years ago, Lesla and I worked with our baseball league board of directors in Lawrence County to establish a baseball league for people with disabilities. We started with 11 players. The main challenge in getting our league established was convincing parents of children with disabilities that their child could actually play baseball!

Because our entire county and region bought into the idea of offering an avenue for people with disabilities to participate in our baseball league, we began to really pick up steam the third year of our program. In the spring of 2014, we had 59 players; this past spring we had 94! We have players from most surrounding counties and even from the northern part of Alabama. During our 2015 spring season, we had four players that came from nearly two hours away to play. We couldn't do it without a wonderful group of volunteers that are dedicated and committed to our efforts. We can't thank them enough for their sacrifice of time and the love they extend to each of our players.



All of our Miracle League players have some sort of a disability, whether intellectual or developmental. Being involved in an organized event gives these children with disabilities self-confidence, and it appears to help them with their expressive language and social interactions. It's truly been amazing to watch the progress of so many children as they grow in their relationships and communication skills.

Due to the league graciously allowing our games to be played during the regular schedule of all of the other games in our four-field complex, our stands are packed every game with parents of "typically-developing" children, who are playing their own games at the same time. Many of these parents have expressed to us their appreciation for our league, and are happy to see the athletes with disabilities participating. Spreading awareness of our athletes' "capabilities" is a definite win for our community!



In fact, the only downside is that playing on a regular field with a grass and dirt surface is often very difficult for our players with mobility issues. We have several players that require the use of wheelchairs, walkers and crutches. The dirt and debris from the field surface gets into the brake systems of the wheelchairs and walkers and causes damage to this expensive equipment. Our players with wheelchairs and walkers also can't join the rest of the team in a regular field dugout; it's not accessible or big enough. Lastly, if the field is the least bit damp, we simply can't play.

Well, Lesa and I decided to do something about that.

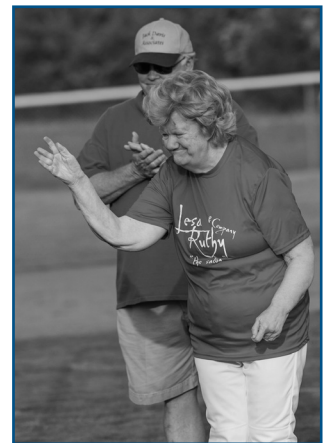
We created a 501(c)(3) called Abigail's Plan, which was launched in May of 2014. The name, Abigail's Plan, came to life as soon as Abigail started communicating with us verbally. In everything we do, Abigail has to know "the plan". From the beginning, Abigail's Plan has had two goals: to construct a Miracle League baseball field and to build disability accessible playgrounds.



Our first focus was to raise \$350,000 to build a totally rubberized Miracle League baseball field. I wasn't sure this massive feat could be accomplished, especially in our small community. Lesa and I discussed a timeline and thought we'd be looking at a five-year project.

But God had a different plan.

We had an overwhelming response in just the first two weeks in support of Abigail's Plan from all over Lawrence County. And organizations from Lawrence and surrounding counties began calling us and scheduling events with all proceeds benefiting Abigail's Plan. Lesa, Abigail, and I found ourselves traveling from one wonderful venue to another. The result: in less than one year, Abigail's Plan had over \$350,000 in the bank!



God has continued to bless at every turn. Our local tire store owners, Donna and Lenny Pack of Chapman's Tire, gave Abigail's Plan the opportunity to be a top 12 finalist in a Bridgestone "Fuel the Cause" national contest. Abigail's Plan received the most online votes and was recently awarded the \$25,000 grand prize.

Our City Mayor and City Council have been absolutely wonderful to work with, as we plan to begin construction this summer to convert an existing field in the complex into a Miracle Field. We are already receiving numerous calls from families several counties away who are eager to bring their kids to play on our new, fully accessible field.

BREAKING GROUND



After the construction of our Miracle Field is complete, Abigail's Plan has a long-term goal to continue fundraising for the purpose of constructing three accessible playgrounds in each part of Lawrence County. After what we accomplished with our Miracle Field, I am convinced we can make this happen too.

If you have a child with disability, find some sort of organized event to get them involved in. If there's nothing in your town, be the trailblazer and get it going!

Tommy Lee Kidd lives in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee with his wife, Lesa, and his daughter, Abigail. He is also the vice chair of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. To learn more about Abigail's Plan, visit www.abigailplan.org

Photos by Mac Brown Photography

REGINA & FIONA:



Friendship Develops through Best Buddies Citizens Program

by Ned Andrew Solomon, Director of Partners in Policymaking, Council on Developmental Disabilities

Let's get one thing straight: Regina Conway and Fiona Hawks are friends. Great friends. The kind of friends who get together and have fun whatever it is they're up to.

Yes, they met through the Tennessee Best Buddies program, which promotes social opportunities and community engagement for individuals with disabilities by pairing them up with peers without disabilities.

And you could even say that Fiona and Regina are a wonderful example of the relatively new Best Buddies Tennessee Citizens program, which makes a great effort to work with an older, adult population, which tends to be more socially isolated than children with disabilities.

Except for the fact that they really don't like the word "Buddies with a capital B" for describing what they have become in a relatively short period of time.

So let's just call them friends.

The two hit it off one evening at an awards and fundraising "Champion of the Year" banquet for Best Buddies Tennessee. Regina was not part of the group; she was a reporter at the time for Channel 4 News. Good friends with Margaret Marchetti Bourland - the program manager for Best Buddies - Regina was asked as a TV personality to give a keynote speech for the celebratory evening. Regina was unfamiliar with Best Buddies Tennessee, so she "Googled" it, appreciated the "mission" of the organization, and agreed to show up.

As luck would have it, Regina was seated at a table with Fiona and her parents, Ed and Maureen Hawks, who were also attending. Now, for those of you who may have had the rare pleasure to meet Fiona, you already know it is very difficult to sit with her and not become immediately engaged. Well, for

that matter, if you've met Regina, you know she's not lacking in the personality department either.

"We sat at the same table and we were talking constantly," recalled Fiona. "My mom was so worried that Regina would miss her 'cue'!"

"Yes, Maureen was more on top of my timing than I was," laughed Regina. "Fiona and I were just chatting! By the end of the night, after speaking with Fiona throughout the evening, I thought 'I've got to get involved with this!' I saw that the benefits of the program were definitely two-fold. If anything, I thought, I could get a really great friend out of this. And I did!"

Fiona did not attend the evening event thinking she'd bond with a friend either. She was just going to support and celebrate a cause that she believes in. "It was so natural," said Fiona. "We didn't know each other at first, but we just began talking at the event. We became friends instantly."

The relationship kicked into the next gear when Fiona, Regina and Margaret went to dinner together at TGI Fridays. "We had our first kind of 'friend date'," said Regina. "We sat together and went over the 'rules' of Best Buddies, how much time you needed to spend together, talk on the phone, things like that."

They scheduled a first get-together for the following week, at one of their favorite haunts, PF Chang's in Cool Springs. Then they just started getting together whenever they felt like it.

"We just keep in touch, and schedule things when we can," said Fiona. "As long as we hang out, that's all that matters."

"It just flows," echoed Regina. "It's not like something to scratch off the list. We just keep in touch; we talk - 'hey, when can you do this?' 'When can we do that?'"



around her, and I find that really interesting on a lot of levels. Fiona is a very deep person; she has a lot of depth. She's so smart, and so easy to talk to. I've gone to her and asked her for advice, for life advice, as I cross different milestones, relationships. I think Fiona has a beautiful perspective on what's important in life, and she's able to focus on those things.

"She's just enriched my life so much, because she's someone I can always depend on," continued Regina. "That's an awesome quality to have in a friend – someone that you can rely on, and you know is there in your corner. I definitely value that. She's made my world a better place."

Best Buddies launched the Citizens program in January 2012, after experiencing much success throughout the past two years in its college and high school programs. The introduction of the adult friendships initiative allows more citizens throughout Nashville and the surrounding areas to get involved with Best Buddies Tennessee and experience the benefits and relationships that often result from the program.

"This" and "that" might be movies, concerts, plays, sporting events, a slumber party or shopping. "Luckily we're interested in the same types of things!" said Fiona. "We had a sleepover and watched *Les Miserables* together – and bawled our eyes out for like two hours!"

Not surprisingly, lots of their get-togethers seem to have something to do with food. "Fiona has opened up my eyes to different new things," said Regina. "Like Indian food, which I had never tried, and I love now!"

Then there are those good friend activities that feel more like family. In August of 2013, Regina got married, and Fiona was there. She also was there for Regina's 30th birthday celebration, and the baby shower for her first son, Carter. Caring for the newly born Carter took Regina out of the socializing loop for a while. But Fiona got to visit within the first couple of weeks. "Fiona was very hesitant, because babies are kind of tough to figure out," recalled Regina. "But she was fantastic with him. Carter loved her right away, and sat in her lap."

"It is wonderful having Regina in my life," said Fiona. "She's been a great example for me. She's able to commit, like in her marriage. I just don't know if I could do that myself. So I'm really grateful to Regina for taking that big step. I do admire kids. I do like them. But I don't have the patience; Regina has that patience. I think it's so great that Regina has those qualities. And so I look up to her."

Of course, the feeling is mutual, but perhaps for different reasons. "Fiona is a very organized person, and I really respect that about her," said Regina. "She has her days planned out, and that has been an awesome example for me, because that's something that I lack! Overall, Fiona's opened my eyes to a lot of things. She is so in-tune to the people



With the launch of Best Buddies Citizens, Tennessee becomes the ninth state office to offer an Adult Friendships program. Additionally, Best Buddies Citizens is active in 17 countries outside the United States. To learn more about Best Buddies Citizens and how to be placed in a friendship, contact Margaret Marchetti Bourland, Program Manager of Adult Friendships at margaretmarchetti@bestbuddies.org or 615.891.2046.

BUILDING SKILLS, CONNECTIONS & EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE THROUGH VOLUNTEERING

by Emma Shouse, Director of Communications, Council on Developmental Disabilities

Photos by Friends Life

Volunteering is an important way for people to connect to their communities. It can help us build our self-esteem, learn more about our gifts and talents, meet new people and make friends, and feel like we're giving back to our neighbors in need. It's also a great way to practice skills and create relationships that can help us find jobs and establish careers, no matter where we are in our journey with employment - whether we're looking for our very first job, wanting to improve our abilities for a current job, or ready for a new employment opportunity.

For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, volunteering can be an incredibly valuable investment of time and energy when it comes to growing social capital, developing leadership skills and adding work-related experience for integrated, competitive-wage employment. Volunteering can allow jobseekers with disabilities - especially those without prior job experiences - to learn about what type of work they enjoy doing, what kind of employment environment they prefer, what kind of people they'd like to work alongside and perhaps even discover a new passion or interest that can translate into a paid job!

For a variety of reasons, many individuals with disabilities struggle to access the same types of early employment opportunities that young adults without disabilities do. This can leave jobseekers with disabilities without many chances to add relevant experiences to a job résumé, and in need of people they could ask for letters of recommendation or to serve as personal references when applying for jobs.

Unfortunately, social isolation can be a problem for many people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Many people with disabilities, especially those who do not work in integrated community jobs, spend the majority

of their days primarily around paid staff, family members and/or other people with disabilities. Volunteering can be a free and easy way to combat this isolation. Becoming a regular volunteer with a specific organization or social cause can build lasting friendships and valuable social connections. Research tells us that the greater a person's circle of social contacts is, the greater the likelihood is of them finding paid employment.

Volunteering expands that social network of people who know us and who have seen our strengths and gifts in action. It can even serve as a natural support in some cases. If a person needs some support during daily activities, family or support staff can potentially work



Stephanie A. volunteers for an outdoor workday at Friends Life with community volunteers.



Kate J., Kyle E., Natalie H., Kate W., Anna Claire W. work at Second Harvest Food Bank packing backpacks for school children.

with the employees of the organization where the person volunteers to understand that person's needs so that they might lend a hand, decreasing the volunteer's reliance on family members or paid staff. After all, the organization is getting unpaid help from the volunteer, so they may be willing to strategize about the support needs of that volunteer if it keeps them showing up for work!

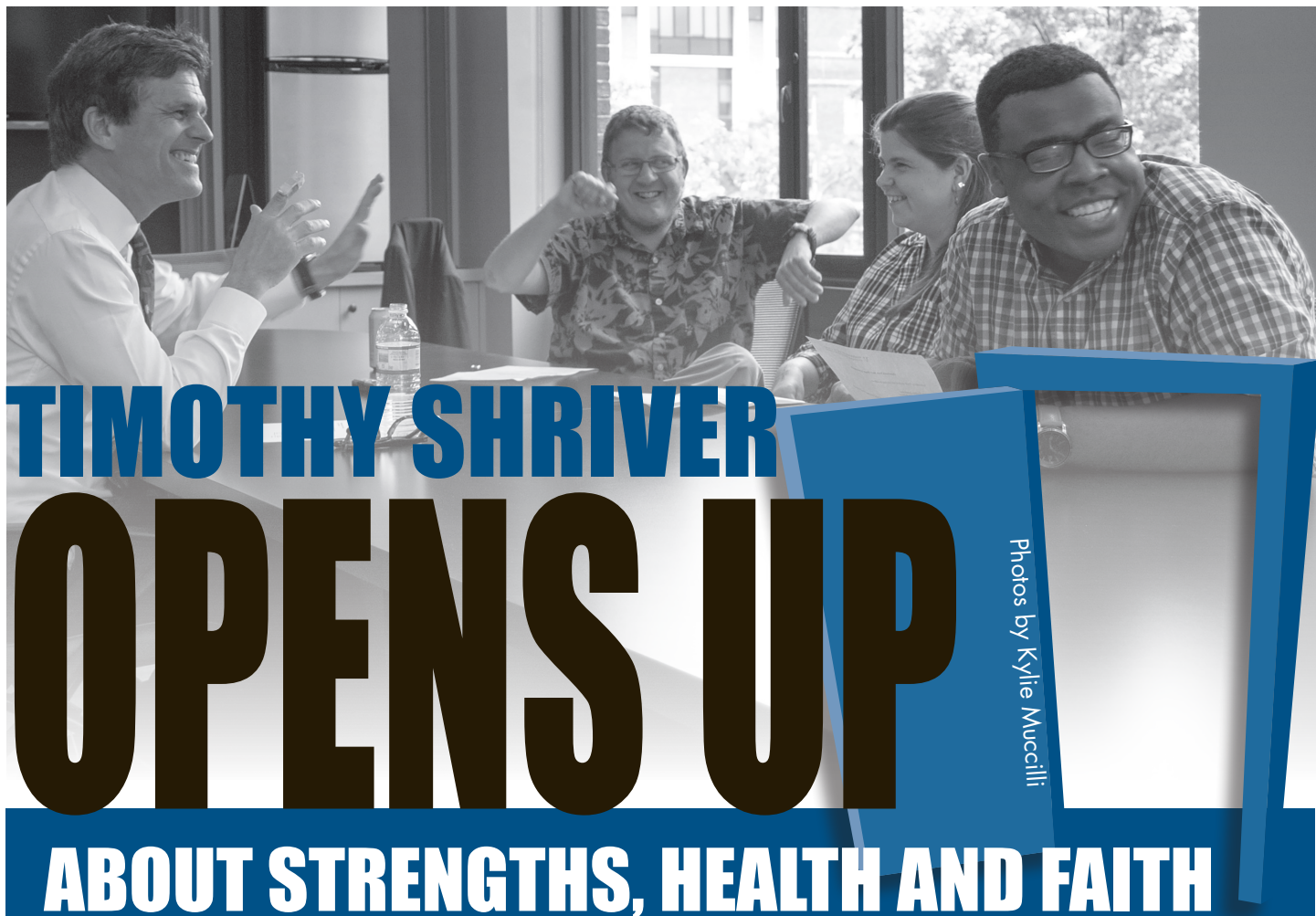
It's not only the individual who wins when people with disabilities are volunteers in their communities. The organization may benefit from recruiting volunteers with disabilities since it increases the diversity of their workforce and helps build its reputation in the community as a welcoming and inclusive place. It might even help the organization be more accessible to others with disabilities, as they learn from you and your experiences. And perhaps others in the community will be educated when they see individuals with disabilities sharing their gifts and talents, by helping them understand the value of including their neighbors with disabilities in ALL aspects of community life.

Volunteering in the community could look like any number of things. Like animals? Shelters often need volunteers to help care for the animals who live there. Nursing homes sometimes have days where pet-owners can bring their dogs and cats to visit residents and chat with volunteers. Enjoy playing with children? Try contacting the local Boys and Girls Club to see if they need volunteers or ask a local

library if they need help with their children's activities. Prefer the outdoors? There are plenty of groups that do park or riverside clean-up days or community garden projects. No matter where someone's interests lie, there are likely opportunities out there for you to build a résumé, meet new people and help out groups and people that need the kind of help one can offer through volunteering!

In order for a volunteering placement to be a success for a person with intellectual or developmental disabilities, it can sometimes take a bit of strategic planning and preparation up front. It might be helpful to have a sit-down with a supervisor or leader at the agency in advance, to ensure that the expectations are clear on both sides. It's a good time for the potential volunteer to ask pertinent questions about what the volunteering will involve, and for the agency head to figure out the skills and attributes of the incoming volunteer. It's also a great time to have a conversation about possible accommodations that might make the volunteer placement more successful. Would written or visual instructions help? What about a flexible schedule with breaks built in? How about an especially patient peer "coach" who can demonstrate new tasks?

Honesty and trust is vital here - the more planning, the better the chances that the agency, and the volunteer, will get the most out of the experience.



TIMOTHY SHRIVER

OPENS UP

Photos by Kylie Muccilli

ABOUT STRENGTHS, HEALTH AND FAITH

by Courtney Taylor, Director of Communications and Dissemination, Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

On May 29, 2015, the 50th anniversary of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center's founding, Timothy Shriver, chairman of Special Olympics, visited the Center to deliver congratulatory remarks to its faculty, staff, and supporters. Prior to his address, Shriver engaged in a series of conversations, including an interview conducted by two graduates and one current student of Next Steps at Vanderbilt, a postsecondary education program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Steven Greiner, Liz Story and Bryshawn Jemison sat down with Shriver to discuss the strengths and abilities of individuals with disabilities, the importance of attending to health and fitness, and his practice for incorporating faith into life and work.

Steven Greiner: *What abilities and skills do you think people with disabilities have that people without disabilities do not have?*

Timothy Shriver: That is a tough question, Steven, because people with disabilities are a big group. There are little children, there are grown-ups, and there are people in the middle. There are people who are rich and poor, people who

come from the North and the South, people short and tall. Everybody's brain works differently, no matter who you are. I would say that the thing I have found is that oftentimes people with disabilities have a lot more grit than most people without disabilities. They are used to fighting hard for what they get. They are used to staying the course for a long time to get what they need. They are used to not giving up. A lot of people without disabilities give up ... People with disabilities have been told "No." "You are never going to read this or that, or you are never going to get to this level of math. You are never going to be able to join that team." They may have been told this for years, but the presence of that grit is what helps fuel people until they finally reach their goals.

People with disabilities also tend to be a lot more open by telling the truth about how they feel. Not always, but a lot of people will say, "I feel fine," when they don't feel fine. In my experience, the person with disabilities may say, "Oh I don't like this," or "I don't feel fine." It gives me an opportunity to say, "Oh my goodness. I am not happy to be here either." It helps us to connect and be honest with one another.

Greiner: *What does friendship mean to you?*

Shriver: I am so tempted to ask you to answer the question first, but I will answer. I think friendship is the life line of society, of life, to be honest. You know we all can be a little bit lonely. We are all a little bit confused. We all are a little bit struggling, all the time. It is a friend who says, "It is okay." It is a friend you can call and say, "What do you think of this?" "What would you do if you were me?" "What would you do if this happened to you?" "Let's go to a game," or "Let's go somewhere together." That would keep you from going through the situation alone. Even surrounded by 10,000 people, you can be alone, but if you have a friend you are not alone. I think that friendship is the life line to happiness.

Liz Story: *My questions to you are about health and fitness. How does Special Olympics help people stay healthy?*

Shriver: The most important way is that it encourages people to play. If you are playing sports, you are getting physically healthy...We now know that staying physically healthy also will keep a person emotionally healthy. Physical play can help to create less stress, less anxiety, and to create more happiness. Special Olympics invites people to get healthy by getting out and playing, getting physically healthy, and at the same time developing healthy friendships.

Story: *Why is it important for parents to help their kids with disabilities have healthy lifestyles and to teach them how to make healthy food choices?*

Shriver: Children who have disabilities have all the same needs as children without disabilities. You may ask, "Why is it important for children with disabilities to go to school?" I would answer, "Why is it important for any child to go to school?" The same answer. Why is it important for children with disabilities to eat healthy and nutritious food, to have physical activity in their lives, to have friendships and to go to college? These things are important for all of us. These things connect us to life. There was



Tim Shriver, Liz Story, Steven Greiner and Bryshawn Jemison

a time, Liz, when people thought it didn't matter whether a person with a disability has the same potential. It was not thought to matter if the person would amount to something. We know that that is wrong. We have to remind ourselves to commit to giving the same gifts of health, nutrition, fitness, social engagement, employment, education and meaningful friendships. All these gifts are for all of us. They are for people with disabilities, too.

Bryshawn Jemison: *How is your faith a part of the work you do, sir?*

Shriver: I'm glad you asked. Most people don't ask me that. So for me, my faith is the experience of trying to practice being connected to all things. There are a lot of words for God. Different religions use different words. My faith has taught me to practice loving everything. I like to think of it like that; all things, everything.

Jemison: *I like that.*

Shriver: You know, Bryshawn, I think we can get distracted and caught up in things we may think are going to make us happy, but really cannot. My faith helps me to return to what is important. My faith community has wonderful people who have been friendly, who have guided me, who have helped me when I have been confused in life. They have always been there for me.

Jemison: *Have you ever been a guest speaker at a school, summer camp, or a church and talked about your faith as part of your work? What did you talk about?*

Shriver: I have been a guest speaker at a church and also at a summer camp. In fact, I talked about my faith a couple of weeks ago at a church. I talked about how the work of being around and being invited to share my life with people who have disabilities has been a great faith teacher. It can be referred to as the gospel. The real meaning of gospel means "good news". I think the good news is that everybody is terrific. That is really amazing news. I also talked about silence, which is something I did not know much about when I was growing up. I have come to discover the power of being silent, or quiet. Silence is the first practice of most religions. We don't hear much about it, because we like that much of religion tends to be a lot of music, dancing and preaching. However, if you look at the great religious leaders, of all religions, they spent a lot of time being silent and not saying or doing anything. I talked about keeping myself quiet regularly, one or two times a day, and how that helps me to keep my faith and connections with people.

Jemison: *That is interesting.*

Shriver: (an audible sigh of relief and then laughter) Thank you for your questions. It has been so much fun talking with you and it was really nice to meet you.

MS. WHEELCHAIR TENNESSEE:

by Samantha Moreno, State Coordinator, Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee

One of the most asked questions I hear is, "What does the titleholder win?" It seems a straightforward question, but the answer is not so simple.

The Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee organization was established in 1996 in order to select the most accomplished and articulate spokesperson for people with disabilities across the state of Tennessee. Ms. Wheelchair is an ambassador of the state of Tennessee. She travels across the state speaking with other representatives and members of the community about the issues and triumphs of individuals with disabilities.

Each competitor has a unique platform that she speaks about at the state competition. Titleholders continue to develop these platforms throughout the year as they prepare for the national competition. Platforms are essentially issues or goals (or both) that are important to the individual. Examples of previous platforms include: accessible public transportation; doing away with disability labels; universal and barrier-free design; disability etiquette; and access to medical care for individuals with mobility disabilities. The titleholder campaigns to bring awareness and positive change to her community.

Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee has also been involved in promoting other organizations in the state. Titleholders attend events for entities in their communities to help bring awareness to their services and goals.



Jean-Marie and Andy Berke,
Mayor of Chattanooga.

In 2012, Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee Jean-Marie Lawrence visited youngsters at Siskin Children's Institute and was later invited to speak at their graduation ceremony. She also spoke with high school students in Ooltewah about her college experience.

This spawned an idea that would later lead her to establish Access-U, which will help individuals with disabilities transition into college. She is currently a member of the Mayor's Council on Disability and the Title II Reassessment Coordinator for the City of Chattanooga. Jean-Marie also serves as Vice President of the Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee Board of Directors.

On March 16, 2013, Bliss Welch was crowned the new titleholder. Soon after, she was honored again and invited to speak before the

Tennessee House of Representatives, where she received a resolution from State Representative Gerald McCormick. During her year, she also visited with children at several elementary schools in Tennessee to read to them and answer their questions about using a wheelchair. As Ms. Wheelchair



Bliss, reading to elementary students.

Tennessee, Bliss also got to experience adapted skiing and cycling with Sports, Arts and Recreation of Chattanooga (SPARC).

Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee 2014 Amanda Szidiropulosz participated in Vanderbilt's Queen for a Day to inspire children who are in the hospital for long periods of time. She also presented ribbons to winners and judged banners at the Special Olympics in Nashville and Cleveland, Tennessee. Amanda attended the Chattanooga Zoo's Dreamnight to meet youth with

Jenny, witnessing Maury County Mayor Charles Norman signing the proclamation to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

disabilities and their families. She was also asked to join the board of the Tennessee chapter of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association.

Jenny Morton, Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee 2015, was recruited to be a celebrity judge at the annual Miss Shining Star pageant within a month after being crowned herself. She rode in the Mule Day Parade in her hometown. She also attended the Tennessee Disability MegaConference and helped Knoxville celebrate the 25th anniversary of the ADA.



...More Than a Crown

While contestants are showcased in a pageant format, Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee is not a beauty contest. Competitors take part in an annual event which includes team-building exercises, educational workshops and several interviews by a panel of judges. The program culminates in a formal ceremony to feature the competitors and to name the new Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee. During this ceremony competitors present their platform speeches and respond to questions from the judges in front of an audience.

After being crowned, Jean-Marie's blog entry read, "The connections that have been made in just one day will empower all of those who attended to stand strong as advocates for people with disabilities. The questions posed to me throughout the day and the workshops I had the opportunity to attend have instilled an even greater desire to break down the barriers faced by people with disabilities. I will do my part to encourage girls and women using wheelchairs to step up and take part in something that has given me an outlet to let my voice be heard as a disability advocate: The Ms. Wheelchair TN Pageant."



Reflecting back on her experience of the 2014 Crowning Ceremony, Amanda said, "It [self-esteem] was something I struggled with for a long time, but my year as Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee has really helped me accept that being differently-abled is beautiful."



Amanda, with Miss Tennessee 2013, Shelby Thompson.

When people ask what the titleholder wins, I tell them the sky's the limit. Carrying the title of Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee is such an individual process that it's impossible to predict how one winner will proceed after receiving the accolade, yet they always stay aligned with the mission. No matter the traveler, it is both a life-changing and life-enriching experience.

Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee is a nonprofit organization with no paid staff. All expenses for the program and events are obtained through fundraising efforts, donations and sponsors.

Governor Haslam recently appointed several new members to the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. Governor-appointed Council members are individuals with disabilities or family members of people with disabilities. Council members are citizens who represent the interests of people with disabilities and families in their local community and help determine the activities and priorities of the Council on Developmental Disabilities. Most importantly, Council members bring the voices of individuals with disabilities to the policy-makers whose decisions impact their lives. Consideration for Council service includes factors such as diversity in ethnicity, type of disability, gender, age of the individual or family member with a disability, and geography, so all parts of the state and both urban and rural areas are represented. If you are interested in serving on the Council on Developmental Disabilities, you can contact Lynette Porter, Council Deputy Director, at lynette.porter@tn.gov.

Meet the New Council Members

LISA JOHNSON

Lisa Johnson lives in Greeneville, Tennessee, and is deeply immersed in campus life at Tusculum College. She is currently balancing three positions there: Director of Learning Support Services and Services for Individuals with Disabilities; Assistant Professor of Special Education; and Associate Vice-President of Academic Affairs, Student Success and Engagement. She holds three degrees from ETSU: a B.S. in Special Education, an M.Ed. in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, and an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Administration.

Lisa is also the sibling of an adult brother with an intellectual disability, as well as a member of the Greeneville City Schools Education Foundation Board and the Takoma Hospital Foundation Board.

BRYANT "TATUM" FOWLER

Born in Oak Ridge, Tatum Fowler attended UT Knoxville, majoring in electrical and nuclear engineering. He spent three years on active duty with the US Army. For the past 12 years he has been a consultant for the DOE (Dept. of Energy) Headquarters in nuclear security, and has held positions at numerous nuclear sites and nuclear weapons sites in Russia and Ukraine. He is currently employed by Alutiiq-Mele, a native Alaskan Indian corporation.

Beyond his work commitments, Tatum is the conservator for his adult brother who has intellectual and developmental disabilities, and is the current president of the Parent Guardian Association (PGA) for the Greene Valley Developmental Center. He is married to Patty Szabo Fowler and has two adult children, T.J. and Katie.

AMY ALLEN

Amy Allen comes to us from Milan, Tennessee in Gibson County. She is currently serving as Special Populations and Services Director for the Trenton Special School District. From 2001 to 2011, Amy was a special education teacher in the same school system. She has a Bachelor's in Education, a Master's in Elementary Education, and an endorsement to her Master's degree in Supervision and Administration.

Amy is the mom of a preschooler with an intellectual disability, and is actively involved as a board member with the Down Syndrome Association of West Tennessee.

SCOTT LILLARD

As a person with Asperger's Syndrome, Scott Lillard has faced many challenges in his life. As a community leader, he is dedicated to breaking down barriers for other people on the autism spectrum. He recently worked as the Administrative Coordinator for Autism Tennessee, and has previously worked for the Organization for Autism Research in Arlington, Virginia, and the US Army Garrison in Stuttgart, Germany.



Scott has a Bachelor's degree in History from Indiana University, and a Master's degree in History from Case Western Reserve University. In 2013, Scott received an Army Achievement Medal for Civilian Service.

KAREN WEST

Karen West lives in Gallatin, Tennessee with her husband, Micheal, her son, Bradley, and her daughter, Tabitha. Tabitha has 1p36 Deletion Syndrome. Disability aside, Tabitha is an accomplished painter who has had numerous pieces in local and national gallery shows, and with Karen's help, sells bookmarks and greeting cards and other original art items.

Karen is an avid supporter of individuals with disabilities in her community, and recently began a sewing class and community engagement program for adult women with intellectual disabilities. She also does custom sewing, embroidery and alterations through her business, Krafty Karen. Along with Douglass Hall, Karen is a 2014-15 graduate of the Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute.



SERINA GILBERT

A 2013 graduate of Partners in Policymaking and a 2008 graduate of the Dickson County Leadership Class, Serina Gilbert earned a Bachelor's of Science degree in social administration from Tennessee State University and a Master's of social work from Howard University in Washington, D.C. She has had over 35 years' experience in the field of social work and human services.

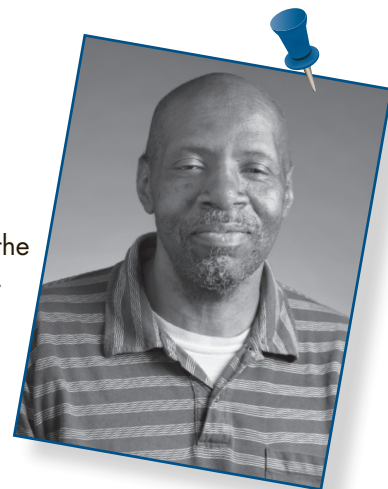


In 2003, she relocated back to her hometown in Charlotte, Tennessee where she immediately became involved in civic and community work. She has served on the board for United Way of Dickson; Dickson County Health Council; Dickson County Community Arts Development; and the Child Advocacy Center's Board of Directors. In addition, Serina was a recipient of the 2008 Governor's Volunteer Star Award. She currently serves as executive director of the Promise Land Community Club, a non-profit historic preservation and community organization located in Dickson County.

DOUGLASS HALL

Douglass Hall has spent the major part of his scholastic and professional careers in the information technology field. He did extensive training in IT at Southwest Tennessee Community College, and has worked as a network/information specialist for Goodwill Homes Head Start, Family Services of the Mid-South and the Childcare Resource and Referral Center. He has also established two businesses himself: Bytesize Networking Services, and the Memphis Technology LunchBox.

Douglass is blind, and is passionate about mentoring other blind individuals in the Memphis area, specifically in the area of securing gainful employment or developing entrepreneurial opportunities. He is also a graduate of the 2014-15 Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute.



Partners 2015-16 Leadership Institute Class Selected

by Ned Andrew Solomon

Since 1993, the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities has recruited adults with disabilities and family members from across the state to participate in a free leadership, self-advocacy and advocacy training. Based on a curriculum created by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, Tennessee Partners is one of about 50 such training programs throughout the world.

Most people who apply to Partners are seeking ways to become more informed about the laws and policies that influence their own lives, or the lives of their loved ones. They want to know about the services and resources that are out there which support individuals with disabilities and their families. They're looking for an easier way of engaging with the community, and overcoming obstacles in the areas of education, employment, housing, transportation and much more. They enter focused on autism, or blindness, or Down syndrome, or cerebral palsy. It is the world they have been living in, 24/7.

If we do our job right, the Partners' perspectives are broadened considerably. Through stories of the challenges and successes of their peers, they learn

about other disabilities, and that we are all part of a community that, throughout history, has been marginalized.

They also learn that they are not alone.

And, as parents and other family members see adults with disabilities fully participate, network and report out on homework assignments, they come to realize that their own sons, daughters, sisters or brothers can also become fully engaged citizens, through perseverance and appropriate supports.

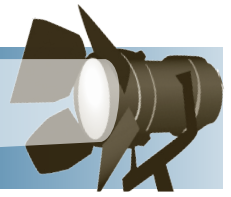
At the same time, adults with disabilities hear the issues brought up by family members, and gain some insights into the fights their own family members fought to make sure they would have the greatest opportunities to succeed.

For many of the hundreds of Tennessee Partners graduates it has been eye-opening, and attitude-changing. Hopefully, the following individuals from across the state, selected for the 2015-16 Class, will experience those same benefits.

Jacquelin Applewhite, Memphis
Diane Brooks, Memphis
Tom Bryant, Germantown
Juan Chirigliano, Shelbyville
Shannon Christie, Spring Hill
Louvisia Conley, Memphis
Greg Costa, Nashville
Parish "Lakenzie" Crawford, Knoxville
Joan Estes, Munford
John T Farley, Memphis
Roslyn Fleming, Mount Pleasant
Wanda Gardner-Slater, Memphis
Dawn Hancock, Rockvale
Beth Harrell, Murfreesboro
Jessee Hill, Alexandria

Clancey Hopper, Antioch
Samantha Jarrell, Murfreesboro
Karen Jones, Memphis
Suzanne Lane, Germantown
Chris Meyer, Brentwood
Iris Moore, Cordova
Leigh Peters, Knoxville
Larry Reid, Bartlett
Amy Smith, Murfreesboro
Tara Tate, Memphis
Emily Tell, Nashville
Iseashia Thomas, Memphis
Marc Walls, Pleasant View
Robert Wells, Madison

TN SPOTLIGHT



In mid-August, Partners 2012-13 graduate **Jeanne Buckman** received her certification as a wound care specialist, for patients who are not healing properly from injuries, through the **National Alliance of Wound Care and Ostomy**.

Jeanne is currently working with a case manager

at **Vocational Rehabilitation** to find a permanent placement in the healthcare field.

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder is proud to announce that **Sarah Kassas** has joined the team. Like other Pathfinder staff, Sarah will be taking calls and helping clients in the community, but she also speaks Arabic fluently, which will assist Pathfinder in serving its multicultural families.



Autism Tennessee welcomes two new staff members: **Executive Director Babs Tierno** and **Program Manager Bev Fulkerson**. Babs has Bachelor's degrees in psychology, sociology, criminal justice, and interdisciplinary legal studies from **UT Knoxville**, and a Master's degree in education from **Middle Tennessee State University**. Most recently, she served as office manager for the **Tennessee Justice Center**.

Bev grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, but has called Nashville home since 1981. She has Bachelor's degrees in behavioral science and communications, and a Master's degree in counseling from **Trevecca Nazarene University**. Prior to Autism Tennessee, Bev was a school administrator for 10 years at a nationally-recognized school for learning differences where she worked with students on the spectrum and their families.

With the loss this year of executive director **Deborah Cunningham**, the **Memphis Center for Independent Living** took steps to keep the Center a vibrant

representative of the disability community with its focus on disability rights. **Sandi Klink**, Partners grad and interim director has been named the MCIL executive director. **Tim Wheat** has been hired as the new program director and **Anthony Sledge**, another Partners grad, is stepping into a new role as Outreach Director.

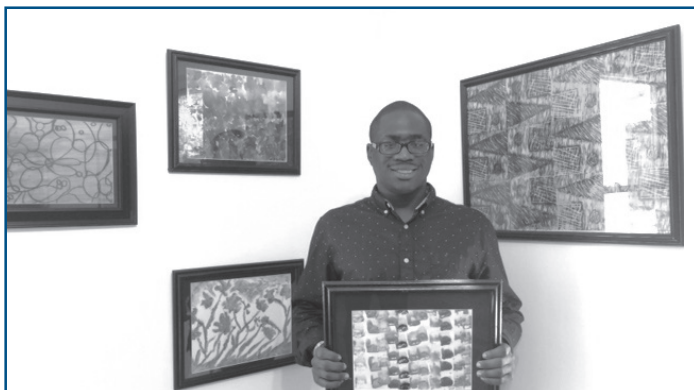


Sandi had the unique opportunity to work side-by-side with Deborah Cunningham for the past 15 years as her deputy. She recently rotated off the **Tennessee Council for Developmental Disabilities** after serving for six years.



As part of the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the **National Federation of the Blind (NFB)**, the oldest and largest nationwide organization of blind Americans, members and supporters of the NFB have set a new **Guinness World Records™** title for largest umbrella mosaic. Two thousand four hundred and eighty individuals, including 30 Tennesseans, simultaneously raised umbrellas to create the image of the National Federation of the Blind icon and the organization's tagline, "Live the Life You Want," on July 8 in Orlando.

TN SPOTLIGHT



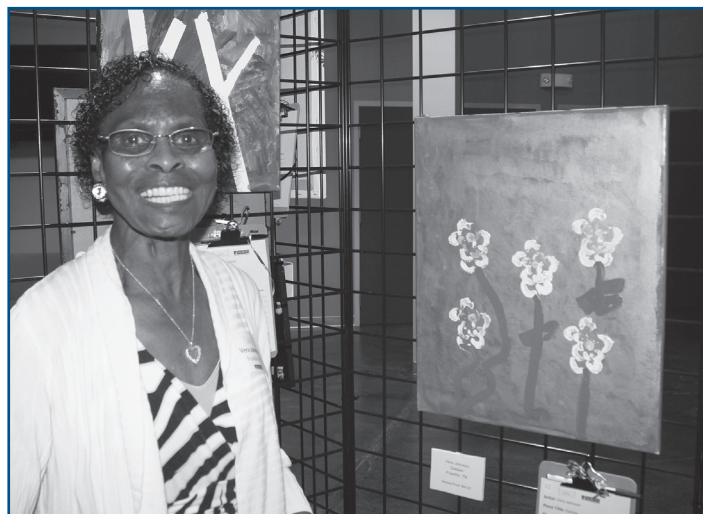
Frequent Breaking Ground Arts Issue contributor **Derrick Freeman** was represented by **Envision Art Gallery** in Knoxville. Derrick's Christmas Series will be available during the gallery's "**Art for the Holidays**" exhibit, November 20 through December 19. Over the years, Derrick has exhibited his art at the **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center**, the **Tennessee Disability MegaConference**, **VSA Tennessee**, **Knoxville Museum of Art** and numerous other locations.

Derrick has received several awards for his artwork and contributions to the autism community. In 2009, he was the recipient of the **Temple Grandin Award** for outstanding contribution to family, community and self; he also received the **Humanitarian of the Year Award** and **Outstanding Artist/Performer Award** from **The Arc Mid-South**.



In August, **Jessica Tessanne**, the daughter of Partners 2014-15 graduate, **Carol Shehan**, won 1st runner-up in the Ms. Senior division of the **Wilson County Fair Celebrating Beauty Contest**.

Julie Duke of Jackson has been consistently working at **Brookdale Jackson Oaks Assisted Living Facility** for 16 years. She preps the tables, serves the residents their food, refills drinks, cleans up tables and prepares tables for the next meal. She averages 20 hours per week and knows all her customers by name. She is very proud of her years there.



WAVES artist Vera, with her painting, *Daisies*.
Photo by Emily Layton.

The 9th Annual '**An Artist's Window**' art exposition and sale, presented by **Waves, Inc.** of Franklin, took place this past July with over 80 visual and performing artists taking part. The event serves as an annual cultivation event, to bring members of the community together with adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities to showcase their artistic abilities. This was the first year that there was a performing arts component to the event, which included singing, dancing, poetry reading and a puppet show performance.

DEBORAH CUNNINGHAM: *In Memoriam*



Deborah Cunningham, the longtime executive director of the Memphis Center for Independent Living (MCIL) and a national activist for disability rights, passed away on Thursday, May 7. Having acquired polio at six, Cunningham lived her life, and forcefully advocated, from a power wheelchair.

She was renowned by friends and colleagues as a tireless advocate for accessibility in public spaces and public transportation, for curb ramps in Memphis and surrounding areas and for helping many people obtain accessible and affordable housing. She filed lawsuits against restaurants and businesses for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

An active member of ADAPT, a grassroots disability rights organization known for its history of public protests through “nonviolent direct action”, Cunningham was also proud of her extensive arrest record, for committing acts of civil disobedience at bus stops, the governor’s office, restaurants, hotels and movie theaters.

Cunningham was born in 1945. She earned a Bachelor’s and Master’s degree in counseling from Memphis State University. She became executive director of the MCIL in 1989. In that role she helped numerous people with disabilities transition from institutions to community living options. She assisted 16 people in leaving nursing homes in Tennessee, enabling them to move into their own apartments in Colorado, where the state provided more resources for independent living.

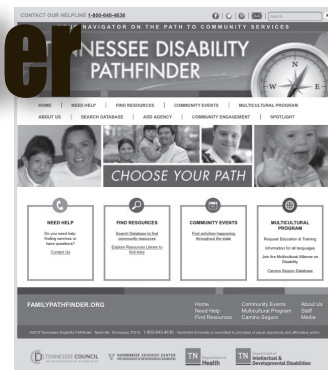
She will be missed by her friends and staff at the MCIL, as well as the entire disability community.

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

In late October, Pathfinder launched a newly redesigned website and database accessible at familypathfinder.org. Users

will still be able to access statewide disability resources, but now that information is easier to find. In addition to a more streamlined and friendly appearance, there are also some exciting new features we want you to know about:

Gets a New Facelift!



- ✓ An ‘advanced search’ where users can browse based on a variety of new criteria including (but not limited to) funding source, age and type of disability.
- ✓ The ‘Need Help’ page shares our email address and phone number, but now offers a third option - a secure online form. This makes it even easier to contact us for free one-on-one assistance.
- ✓ An ‘About Us’ page now includes photos and contact information for each employee so our staff is even more accessible.
- ✓ The website now links easily to our Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest accounts to engage more people on social media.
- ✓ The ‘Community Engagement’ feature archives our monthly newsletter, The Compass, and allows an easy way to subscribe. On this page, you can also download our redesigned informational flyers and bookmarks.
- ✓ The ‘Spotlight’ section shows users information for upcoming and past Pathfinder trainings and presentations.
- ✓ Our Multicultural section links to our ‘Camino Seguro’ page and users can switch text from English to Spanish with the simple click of a button.

We encourage users to browse the new site and share their reactions and testimonials on social media. Using the hashtag #HowIUsePathfinder, we would like our followers to post how our services can be or have been helpful to them.

Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities

Davy Crockett Tower, 1st Floor
500 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, TN 37243

Return service requested

MEMBERSHIP AND STAFF

COUNCIL CHAIRPERSONS

Roger D. Gibbens, Chair
Tommy Lee Kidd, Vice Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Amy Allen, Milan
Norris L. Branick, Jackson
Stephanie Brewer Cook, Knoxville
Rick Davis, Hixson
Evan Espey, Antioch
Tatum Fowler, Knoxville
Dawn Fry, Cookeville
Serina Gilbert, Charlotte
Douglass Hall, Memphis
Lisa Johnson, Greeneville
Scott Lillard, Nashville
Renee M. Lopez, Gallatin
William Lovell, Hohenwald
Deborah McBride, Wildersville
Bob Plummer, Johnson City
Tecia Pryor, Smithville
Debbie Riffle, Humboldt
Steven Sheegog, Memphis

STATE AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES

Commissioner Debra Payne,
Department of Intellectual and
Developmental Disabilities
Commissioner Candace McQueen,
Department of Education
Director Yovancha Lewis Brown,
Department of Human Services,
Vocational Rehabilitation Services
Commissioner E. Douglas Varney,
Department of Mental Health and
Substance Abuse Services
Dr. Michael D. Warren, Division of Maternal
and Child Health, Department of Health
Assistant Commissioner Patti Killingsworth,
Bureau of TennCare
Executive Director Linda O'Neal,
Commission on Children and Youth
Executive Director Ralph Perry,
Tennessee Housing Development Agency
Executive Director Jim Shulman,
Commission on Aging and Disability

UNIVERSITY CENTERS FOR EXCELLENCE REPRESENTATIVES

Elise McMillan, J.D., Co-Director,
Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence
in Developmental Disabilities
Frederick Palmer, M.D., Director,
University of Tennessee Boling Center for
Developmental Disabilities

PROTECTION & ADVOCACY

Lisa Primm, Executive Director,
Disability Rights Tennessee

COUNCIL STAFF

Wanda Willis, Executive Director
Lynette Porter, Deputy Director
JoEllen Fowler, Administrative Assistant
Mildred Sparkman, Administrative Secretary
Alicia Cone, Director of Grant Program
Tiffany Mason, Director of Public Policy
Emma Shouse, Director of Communications
Ned Andrew Solomon, Director of Partners in
Policymaking™ Leadership Institute